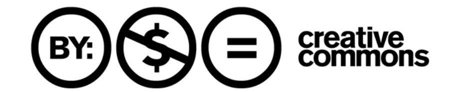


Études chinoises

Revisiting *Bureaucratie et Famine en Chine au XVIIIe siècle*: Notes for Revising Contemporary Notions of Governance within and beyond China

Bin R. Wong



Résumé

Le premier livre de Pierre-Étienne Will, publié en 1980, ainsi que sa traduction anglaise, augmentée, de 1990, montrait aux historiens du XVIIIe siècle comment les politiques publiques chinoises s'employèrent alors à résoudre de sévères crises de subsistance, un fléau ayant affligé à cette époque bien des parties du monde. Cette étude fut la première d'une série de travaux nous ayant permis de mieux comprendre les moyens d'action et les priorités de l'État Qing. La comparaison entre les politiques anti-famines de la Chine de la moitié du XVIIIe siècle avec celles de la mi-XXe siècle offre des clefs stimulantes pour aider à expliquer pourquoi les secours de temps de disette fonctionnent mieux dans un contexte donné que dans un autre. Les politiques chinoises de la mi-XVIIIe siècle s'inscrivaient dans une approche globale de la gestion de l'ordre social et de son substrat matériel. Ces politiques chinoises du seuil de la période moderne témoignent d'une approche originale de la gouvernance, propre à jeter un éclairage nouveau sur certaines des différences entre les conceptions actuelles de la gouvernance en Chine et en Occident.

Abstract

R. Bin Wong (王国斌) : *Revisiting Bureaucratie et Famine en Chine au xviiie Siècle : Notes for Revising Contemporary Notions of Governance within and beyond China*

Pierre-Etienne Will's first book (published in 1980) and its English translation with revisions in 1990 introduced historians to eighteenth-century Chinese state policies to address severe subsistence crises, a threat found in many parts of the world during that century. This study became the first of several that have given us a clearer understanding of the Qing state's capacities and priorities. The contrasting experiences of responses to famine in the mid-eighteenth and midtwentieth centuries in China offer a challenging conundrum regarding why famine relief works better in some situations rather than others. The mid-eighteenth century Chinese policies toward famine were part of broader approaches to managing social order and its material foundations. They offer a distinctive early modern Chinese approach to governance that might help illuminate some differences between contemporary Chinese and Western notions of governance.

摘要

王国斌 (R. Bin Wong) : 再讀《十八世紀中國的官僚制度與荒政》——對當代中外治國理念的一點思考魏丕信 (P. E. Will) 1980 出版的首部著作及其 1990 年的英譯增改本向歷史學界介紹了十八世紀的中國政府應對災荒的各項政策——而災荒則是這一時期世界許多地區共同面對的問題。繼這部著作之後，多項研究使我們對清政府的能力和施政重心有了更加清晰的認識。中國在十八世紀中期和二十世紀中期的災荒中截然不同的救濟經歷向我們提出了一個難題，即在什麼情況下政府對災荒的救濟更加有效。清政府在十八世紀中期採取的賑災政策是屬於更廣泛的管理社會秩序及保證其物質基礎的方針的一部分。他們共同代表了一套獨特的近代早期的治國經驗；這些早期的經驗也許可以幫助我們理解當代中國與西方世界在治國理念上的區別。

R. Bin Wong*

Revisiting *Bureaucratie et Famine en Chine au XVIIIe siècle*: Notes for Revising Contemporary Notions of Governance within and beyond China

Résumé — Le premier livre de Pierre-Étienne Will, publié en 1980, ainsi que sa traduction anglaise, augmentée, de 1990, montrait aux historiens du XVIII*e siècle comment les politiques publiques chinoises s'employèrent alors à résoudre de sévères crises de subsistance, un fléau ayant affligé à cette époque bien des parties du monde. Cette étude fut la première d'une série de travaux nous ayant permis de mieux comprendre les moyens d'action et les priorités de l'État Qing. La comparaison entre les politiques anti-famines de la Chine de la moitié du* XVIII*e siècle avec celles de la mi-*XX*e siècle offre des clefs stimulantes pour aider à expliquer pourquoi les secours de temps de disette fonctionnent mieux dans un contexte donné que dans un autre. Les politiques chinoises de la mi-*XVIII*e siècle s'inscrivaient dans une approche globale de la gestion de l'ordre social et de son substrat matériel. Ces politiques chinoises du seuil de la période moderne témoignent d'une approche originale de la gouvernance, propre à jeter un éclairage nouveau sur certaines des différences entre les conceptions actuelles de la gouvernance en Chine et en Occident.*

When Pierre-Etienne Will's *Bureaucratie et Famine en Chine au* XVIII*e siècle* appeared in 1980, Western images of Chinese imperial bureaucracy were typically fuzzy and often fanciful. We knew some of the basic regulations and institutions of the bureaucracy and numerous examples of the sort of dysfunction that could call well-meaning officials to reform. The best

* R. Bin Wong is the director of the Asia Institute and distinguished professor of history at University of California, Los Angeles.

Western-language scholarship of the 1960s, like *La Bureaucratie* Céleste. *Recherches sur l'*économie *et la société de la Chine traditionnelle* by Étienne Balázs, *Local Government under the Ch'ing* by Ch'u Tung-tsu, and *Rural China: Social Control in the Nineteenth-century* by Hsiao Kung-chuan persuaded readers of the profound challenges and limited successes of China's pre-modern bureaucracy. Most Western treatments stressed the limited capacities of the Chinese state, the arbitrary character of imperial rule, or both. In 1973, for example, Thomas Metzger's *The Internal Organization of Ch'ing Bureaucracy: Legal, Normative, and Communication Aspects* underscored Chinese officials' ill-fated efforts at governing the Qing empire, arguing for Weberian-inspired incentives—a "probationary ethic"—necessary to keep officials at the herculean task of maintaining order across the world's largest and most populous country. *Bureaucratie et Famine en Chine au xviiie siècle* was, thereafter, the first work of Western scholarship to set us on a path toward an empirically grounded understanding of the important tasks undertaken by the Chinese bureaucracy.

Divided into three major parts, the first establishes the social setting within which harvest failures created hardship and suffering, and the second—the heart and soul of the work's reconstruction and analysis—explains how eighteenth-century officials went about famine relief through Fan Guancheng's account of his 1743 intervention in Zhili. The book closes by setting these remarkable efforts within a diachronic sweep of the demographic, economic, and environmental changes that made eighteenth-century relief efforts impossible to replicate in subsequent times.

I imagine that the 1980s reader of French historical writing must have found this book extremely approachable, as the problems of agrarian subsistence crises and their attendant social and political problems are so basic to *Ancien Régime* history, the case of China being revelatory as concerns government action and, at the same time, reassuring, given that the heroic, long-term efforts of Chinese bureaucrats proved no match against large-scale processes of social change and environmental degradation. Indeed, Will suggests that the very success of Qing famine relief efforts only exacerbated the tragic consequences of a society seeking to support a population beyond that which it could realistically support in the nineteenth century.

For an American student of Chinese history, the book was a revelation as to how one could set a vivid social stage upon which to

portray Chinese bureaucracy in action. Therein we saw a kind of social and economic history as yet unknown to the United States—what the Japanese of the 1970s and 1980s called *shakai keizaishi* 社會經濟史—coupled with a scrupulous attention to texts once thought the exclusive domain of philology. This scholarship had a second life as translated into English by Elborg Forster, *Bureaucracy and Famine in Eighteenth Century China* in 1990, which allowed Will to introduce corrections and newly available materials from Chinese archives. Between the French and English editions, therefore, this book straddles the divide in Qing historiography between studies using archival materials and those predating the possibility. Will was one of the pioneers in the West to use Qing archives and remained a leading advocate for studying published texts, as the long-standing project on Chinese administrative handbooks that he has led attests. Another one of his books that depended crucially on the Qing archives was *Nourish the People: the State Civilian Granary System in China, 1650-1850*, a book he and I co-authored with additional contributions by James Lee, Jean Oi, and Peter Perdue. That book extended the studies of Qing dynasty subsistence policies—their institutional bases and practical impacts—as an example of what the Chinese bureaucracy could and could not do and how it went about it.

One of the more significant discoveries of *Bureaucratie et Famine* and *Nourish the People* was the substantive commitment of Qing officials to an agenda of policies and practices aimed to intervene in the commoner's subsistence conditions. These were, in turn, components of a larger repertoire of strategies to promote production, trade, and the circulation of practical or useful knowledge around the empire. While the political economy of China's agrarian empire was quite different from the mercantilism and cameralism of early modern Europe, it nonetheless shared certain features in common, be they framed within distinct architectures of political priorities. Different priorities led key features of policy making to differ across world regions, those of famine relief, as first brought to the attention of Western scholars by Pierre-Etienne Will's major study, being some of the most salient. Future studies of Qing policy may now proceed from a clear understanding of the state's capacity to address such issues to focus on the choices made and the costs and benefits of alternative action.

Will's study also managed to contextualize the issue of bureaucratic corruption by evaluating actual relief efforts, in terms of the move-

ment of grain and people, against the record of mistakes and abuses made during these operations. Some were self-serving violations of the rules, and others were failures due to the tremendous demands of manpower or material resources. This study helps us to better understand the evaluation of the Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese experiences of bureaucratic rule made more than quarter of a century later by Alexander Woodside in *Lost Modernities: China, Vietnam, Korea, and the Hazards of World History*—a brief but powerful meditation on the problems and possibilities of East Asian bureaucratic rule from late medieval through early modern times.[1] Woodside considers the rich historical experiences that each country had with bureaucracies built on meritocratic ideals. These ideals, only possible in a post-feudal context, created expectations among the ruled that administrators would take care of meeting public needs, he argues, the bureaucratic commitment to welfare goals, in turn, engendering an apathy among the population towards meeting on their own social needs. Challenges familiar from later on in European history thus emerged relatively early in East Asia, meritocratic bureaucracies having developed abilities (and abuses) that were precocious by European standards. Will's study of famine relief gave us an appreciation of the simple fact that, in order to have corruption, you have to have rules to violate and policies that can go wrong.

While Woodside stressed the commonalities of the global bureaucratic experience, Will's work on famine relief suggests an important structural difference in the Chinese case. Embedded in the Chinese bureaucratic tradition is a substantive agenda of rule composed of both priorities and policies intended to affect the imperial subject. On this agenda, famine relief appears to have loomed far larger than it did in early modern Europe, which was far more focused on interstate competition for wealth and power. There, rulers developed bureaucracies with the principal aim of mobilizing revenue and bigger and better armies.

Because Chinese bureaucracy pursued social and economic policies intended for the benefit of the common people, in urban and agrarian

---

1. Alexander Woodside, *Lost Modernities: China, Vietnam, Korea, and the Hazards of World History*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006.

settings, the goals of popular welfare emerged as central to Chinese ideas of good governance. These basic expectations, shared by officials and commoners alike, became moral responsibilities to be acted upon through bureaucratic means. In the eighteenth century, famine relief was part of a larger package of policies and efforts undertaken by the bureaucracy to ameliorate hardships and promote more effective foundations for agrarian economic prosperity. Over an extended period of time, bureaucratic capacities ebbed and flowed and the specific challenges facing officials also changed.

Nineteenth-century officials sponsored institutional innovations, some of which drew upon extant policy options, or earlier practices, to respond to both domestic unrest and foreign demands. We conventionally view the nineteenth-century empire as lacking the capacities and flexibility necessary to emerge as a strong modern state, looking back, at least implicitly, from the failure of the dynasty in 1911. We hear very little about bureaucratic competence as it figured in creating state successes between 1912 and 1949; facing the creation of a new Communist regime in the 1950s, we thus have few historical threads by which to connect the country's late imperial Confucian past to its post-war Communist regime. Happily, some recent scholarship has been helping us to see the linkages. On famine relief, specifically, Pierre Fuller's work on north China famine relief in 1920-21 identifies native and missionary charities, military governments, and local officials, together with local residents, as having addressed social welfare needs more actively and effectively than typically assumed to have been possible.[2] Lillian Li's magisterial *Fighting Famine in North China: State, Market, and Environmental Decline, 1690s-1990s*, locates the perduring struggle to achieve food security in government efforts at water control to maintain production conditions as well as the government storage and distribution of grain.[3] For some major bureaucratic and engineering challenges, such as regulating the Yellow River, the challenge of managing a large ecosystem was a perennial

2. Pierre Fuller, "North China Famine Revisited: Unsung Native Relief in the Warlord Era, 1920-1921," *Modern Asian Studies*, 2013, 47.3, pp. 820-50.
3. Lillian Li, *Fighting Famine in North China: State, Market, and Environmental Decline*, *1690s-1990s,* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.

one in the Qing, Republican and Communist era, as David Pietz's *The Yellow River: The Problem of Water in Modern China* makes abundantly clear.[4] The persistence of past practices, be they altered to changing conditions, helps us to appreciate the plausibility of Chinese efforts to rekindle the spirit of Confucian thought in the twenty-first century, with its diverse intensions and uncertain results.

Aware of the continued bureaucratic challenges of food security and water control, we rarely think to connect this with the more recent attention paid to Confucian ideology as a source of values and principles of individual behaviour. What is missing from these discussions is consideration of how Confucian ideology was not only personal, or individual, but *political*, and how that political ideology inspired basic late imperial institutions. To consider Confucian ideology and institutions, together, as a relevant framework through which to view the present may well seem inconceivable to domestic and foreign observers; even so, it merits a moment of consideration, since it was the relationship between the two that was at the heart of bureaucratic rule and the logic of good governance in earlier centuries. Late imperial bureaucratic rule was predicated upon officials serving selflessly or, at least, without the express aim of using their official positions for personal gain. This expectation did not mean that personal values were not to affect the individual's goals and approach to his official duties. Indeed, these men were educated in the same curriculum as the economic and cultural elites. On this shared ideological foundation, officials and elites from no later than the eleventh and twelfth centuries began to formulate a shared agenda of institution built to foster an ideological basis for local social order.

Buddhist and Taoist beliefs and practices were part of social life as well, but rather than mutually exclusive elements nurtured in separated spaces by distinct groups, they formed an amalgam with Confucian precepts and institutions that was basically stable over time. Together Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist ideas supported a continuum of institutional and social practices that included famine

4. David Pietz, *The Yellow River: The Problem of Water in Modern China,* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015.

relief as a temporary response to extraordinary disruptions. Data from Hunan Province furthermore suggests that the roles of officials and elites in funding local granaries varied in an economically plausible manner—in locally rich economies, elites were able and willing, to invest in granaries, while similar granaries in poorer areas usually fell to officials).[5] There existed a structural relationship between local elites and officials spanning formal and informal institutions for the promotion of local social order that was based on shared precepts of a Confucian ideology. This nexus did not survive the fall of the Qing or the changes in Republican-era ideology and institutions that followed. A 1950s promotion of a Confucian ideological revival is impossible to imagine. Yet, in other ways, the new regime affirmed in form a basic connection between ideology and institutions that marked the late imperial Confucian era. Moreover, the party-state relied on party members whose commitments to its vision of a socialist future complemented the bureaucratic responsibilities of implementing its agenda of rule.

Party members were a formally organized elite serving in roles similar to those of their Confucian counterparts who, like some party members, engaged in governance from positions outside the bureaucracy. The difference, structurally speaking, is the formal organization of the party and the informal nature of late imperial elite networks. The PRC's division of party and state at an institutional level, coupled with the inter-meshing of government and party personnel, created a situation in which distinctions *and* connections became important to, though not synonymous with, the sometimes uneasy tension between being "red" and "expert"—a dichotomy familiar to all students of PRC history. The dominance of the state over elites in the first three decades of Communist rule meant that political success within the party became the principal criterion for social advancement. This contrast between the positions of Confucian and Communist elites had implications for the organization of governance. The eighteenth-cen-

5. R. Bin Wong, "Confucian Agendas for Material and Ideological Control in Modern China," in Theodore Huters, R. Bin Wong, and Pauline Yu (eds.), *Culture and State in Chinese History: Conventions, Accommodations and Critiques*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, pp. 303-25.

tury coordination between officials and elites gave way, after 1949, to the elite's subordination to the party-state. This followed at least a half century of political turmoil during which the transformation of local social institutions asserted the presence of the state into contexts where it was hitherto invisible in the eighteenth century).[6] Confucian governance was never riven by a distinction parallel to that of the Communist red and expert, because Confucian ideology and institutions alike asserted the use of bureaucratic means to achieve ideologically defined objectives, including the provision of famine relief. This imperative was lacking during the Great Leap Forward (1958-61), a subject about which we know far more since the appearance of *Bureaucratie et Famine* , in Chinese and English, thanks to Cao Shuji's 曹树基 2005 *Dajihuang—1959-1961 nian de Zhongguo renkou* 大饥荒：1959-1961 年的中国人口 (The Great Famine: The Population of China from 1959 to 1961) and Ralph Thaxton's 2008 *Catastrophe and Contention in Rural China: Mao's Great Leap Forward Famine and the Origins of Righteous Resistance in Da Fo Village*. Together, these monographs give us systematic, quantitative evidence on population-loss and a textured account of the politics of famine struggles in a particular village.

The ideological imperatives of the Great Leap Forward proved a disincentive for local leaders to supply the sort of information about food-supply conditions typical of eighteenth-century officials. This contrast is basic to a broader understanding of how the mid-eighteenth century Qing state, as Pierre-Etienne Will so persuasively demonstrated, was able to intervene in subsistence crises in ways unimaginable in the late 1950s. The official efforts of the eighteenth century fell within a repertoire of state policies, situated amidst institutions of local order and economic activity, which enabled officials to directly and indirectly move grain in response to supply and demand, with extra-bureaucratic efforts to support direct distribution to famine victims. The Qing political economy related the issues of extraordinary distribution with concerns of production, alleviating the danger of successive harvest failures.

6. R. Bin Wong, "Chinese Social Relations and Political Transformations in Historical and Comparative Perspectives: A Preliminary Sketch of New Orientations in Social Science Research," *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2009, 2.3, 1-20.

Expanding production involved support for migration and opening new land, as well as promoting the circulation of knowledge about agricultural and craft production technologies. The fact that commercial exchange operated according to supply and demand, combined with low transit taxes and the infrequence of trade disruption due to armed conflict, created conditions more favourable to domestic trade than those in early modern Europe. Qing famine relief was thus embedded in a broader set of practices that at once made the likelihood of famine lower and the possibility of successful intervention higher than was the case for either early modern Europe or 1950s China.

China's eighteenth-century political economy differed from the political economy of the 1950s in certain obvious ways, some consequences of which, however, are not always adequately connected to their causes. The PRC state set out two basic economic objectives that were in intrinsic tension with each other. First and foremost, they had to restore material stability to the countryside, where some eighty per cent of the population lived. This meant the re-establishment of production disrupted by civil war, the redistribution of resources, and the reduction of rural income inequalities. Second, and most important for the future of the society, the state wanted to create an industrial sector that would support a strong state, that would be safe from foreign attack, and that would produce consumer goods needed by the common people. Given its position during the Cold War, it could not access foreign capital and technology except from the Soviet Union, and neither could it produce for, nor import from, foreign markets. One basic consequence of these conditions was the government's turn to agricultural production as a source of the capital to build new industrial plants. The extraction of grain took place at higher levels and through new institutional channels, which expanded at the expense of previous forms of commercial exchange. The institutional capacity to move grain in economic and political response to harvest instabilities was limited, despite the availability of better technologies of transportation in the 1950s than in the 1750s. From the vantage of bureaucracy and governance issues, the most important difference, already introduced above, concerned the tension between bureaucratic competence and political fervour that was expressed in the Great Leap Forward—a divide that would become even stronger in the Cultural Revolution of the mid-1960s. Bureaucratic competence

would have required local officials during the Great Leap Forward to report truthful estimates of harvest conditions, but they instead falsified their figures so as to satisfy political expectations and protect themselves from additional scrutiny and criticism. There was a particular kind of political rationality to false reporting, but it contributed to an unrealistic assessment of food supply conditions and problems.

One way to assess the Great Leap Forward tragedy is to contrast it with other twentieth-century famines and the explanations for their occurrence, and subsequent absence, in most all parts of the world. Amartya Sen famously suggested that famines are more the result of distribution than production, and when people gain entitlements to food, they will not starve because their access to distribution is assured.[7] Sen associated such entitlements with democratic governments in which poor job performance—including allowing or making people starve because their access to available food is denied—leads the responsible party to lose re-election. Since a free press is a hallmark of a democratic system, news of such serious mistakes will become widely known, assuring negative consequences for those at fault. This explanation asserts the importance of the political system, assuming a level of bureaucratic competence supported by economic institutions, including distributional channels, adequate to the challenges of meeting severe dearth. Bureaucratic competence is thus a precondition, and political will, or commitment, is the key variable between places experiencing famine or not. This explanation may work for many democratic societies, because they have well-developed institutional infrastructures to address famine issues. Democratic systems hold officials accountable for meeting expectations for solving social crises, and if voters do not believe officials acted responsibly, they can be voted out of office. Pierre-Etienne Will's work on eighteenth-century Chinese famine relief, however, shows that the principles and practices of democracy are not necessary for famine relief to work; nor are they necessarily the easiest solution to famine relief or other forms of good governance, because democratic political systems are difficult to build.

7. Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famine: An Essay on Entitlements and Deprivation*, Oxford University Press, 1983.

Most examinations of the strengths of democratic systems stress transparency and the effectiveness with which they communicate information and encourage citizens, based on that information, to make politically consequential decisions. Good governance is a concept used in the policy world, especially as concerns the allocation of development aid based on achieving traits of democratic political systems. The World Bank has six categories to formulate their metric of good governance: (1) Voice and Accountability; (2) Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism; (3) Government Effectiveness; (4) Regulatory Quality; (5) Rule of Law; and (6) Control of Corruption. Public policy scholar Matt Andrews of Harvard's Kennedy School has pointed out that having metrics of good governance before articulating a theory of how to achieve these traits fails to offer plans for achieving ideal norms developed in different circumstances than those to which they are being applied.[8] Achieving good governance entails knowing more than the desired end point; it requires context-specific efforts to achieve desirable results.

Matt Andrews's observations about the theoretical challenges of democratic criteria of good governance, considered together with the case of eighteenth-century Chinese famine relief, suggests a possibility we may find difficult to accept: the principles and practices of democracy may not be necessary for famine relief to work, nor may they be the easiest way to go about such relief, or other forms of good governance, because democratic political systems are difficult to build. More challenging yet are contemporary Chinese efforts to talk about governance in terms they deem more appropriate than those put forth in Western discourse. As outlined above, Western discussions of good governance involve the identification of institutional forms deemed necessary for corporate governance to flourish and, hence, facilitate economic growth. In addition to the issues of economic and political governance covered in Western discourse, the Chinese address the subject of social governance in several ways. To situate Chinese concerns comparatively, and in terms of Chinese history, briefly recall

8. Matt Andrews, "The Good Governance Agenda: Beyond Indicators without Theory," *Oxford Development Studies*, 36.4 (December 2008), 379-407.

some basic differences in how political philosophy and practice have been conceived in contemporary times in China and the West.

Key components of Western political philosophy are built upon the foundations of social contract theory, which posits an agreement among the members of a society to form a state, and this agreement, in turn, suggests certain ways in which the relationship between individual and the state will be conceived and realized. This logic provides a framework within which various democratic principles and policies can develop. A recent Chinese statement of the contrast between Western and Chinese conceptions of state and society notes that Western societies create states, which, in turn, create political parties, but in China, the Communist Party creates the Chinese state, which, in turn, forms society. [9] It thus is a political responsibility of the Communist Party to create principles of social governance. Liberal Chinese political thinker Yu Keping, whose resignation from his post as deputy chief of the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau was accepted in October 2015, fleshes out a logic for explaining the need for social governance. He makes a distinction between traditional good government (善政) and contemporary good governance (善治), suggesting that contemporary good governance is both political and social, entailing the officials and the people to collectively rule or order society (官民共治). [10] Chinese understandings of the challenges of good governance are based on clarifying the similarities and differences between *their* understanding of good governance and those formulated in the West. Such efforts are made from the vantage point of the party-state's challenge to transform its relationship to society in ways that can create more effective responses to the challenges China, specifically, and the world, more generally, face, be these issues of public services, the environment, or equitable economic growth. What is missing is the acknowledgement of how there was already a conception of good governance in late imperial China that could, at

9. Renmin luntan 人民論壇 (ed.), *Daguo zhili* 大國治理 (Large Country Governance), Beijing: Zhongguo jingji chubanshe, 2014, p. 39.
10. Yu Keping 俞可平, *Lun Guojia zhili xiandaihua* 論國家治理現代化 (The Modernization of National Governance), Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2014, pp. 3, 14.

least at times, including those discovered by Pierre-Etienne Will in *Bureaucratie et Famine en Chine au XVIIIe siècle*, be approached in practice.

Contemporary discussions of good governance, whether in the West or China, lack an awareness of the Chinese traditions thereof, which encouraged the joint participation of official and elite in building institutions of local social order that spanned cultural, economic, and social practices. Such activities were pursued without the sharp distinction between state and society at the core of Western ideas about how the state takes shape from the decisions and agreements of the people who created their governments. Contemporary discussions regarding good governance could well benefit from consideration of how past Chinese practices might matter to understanding contemporary Chinese concerns, specifically, and to advancing a global consensus on models of good governance, more generally.